

My father tells me that when I came to England in the Summer of 1964, I was holding an umbrella as I stepped off the plane at Heathrow and the umbrella was taller than me. At four years old I arrived with my mother to join my father in a land of mist, rain and smog. From the bright rural pastures of Azad Kashmir, the noisy bustle of British life must have been a massive culture shock for my mother. My father, Haji Qurban Hussain Hashmi had arrived a year or so earlier, found a job at a textile mill, bought a back to back terraced house and promptly called his wife and then only child to be with him in this new exciting phase of their lives. He had wanted most of all for me, to be educated in this great land and become what all Asian parents want their children to be; a doctor. Together in an alien land, with no familiarity of language or custom, they raised a family of six children, three boys and three girls.

In those days there were very few families from the sub-continent. Migrants, mostly men came with dreams of prosperity and success in Great Britain, the Mother Country of the Commonwealth of Nations. Many fell into the trap of the 'myth of return', that somehow after making lots of money, that they would return to their home countries and live it large on their newfound wealth. However, the challenges faced by these migrant workers both in and out of the workplace, the low wages and extraordinary demands of the families back home made migration into the UK in the sixties a honey trap of mixed blessings.

The sense of camaraderie amongst the hard working and loyal migrant workers and the all too often refusal of landlords to let properties to these workers led to the development of savings committees. This allowed the members of these savings clubs to quickly purchase cheaper, low end terraced properties in the post-war economic climate of Britain. The textile moghuls of the wool trade had built terraced houses to house the mill workers, and in the areas of Chapeltown, Harehills, Hyde Park, Burley and Kirkstall, and these became the abode of many South Asian families over the years.

Uncle Ali was a Bengali sailor who had jumped ship at Southhampton in the fifties with his friend and made it to Leeds. He had been settled with his English wife who had become a muslim and was now known as my auntie Safina. There is a beautiful irony in that the name, Safina also means a boat. She had befriended my mother and became so close that she named my baby sister Freda, born exactly a year after we arrived. She carried him six children with whom I grew up with and still see occasionally today. Uncle Ali was of the Syed family and when his friend died, he negotiated against a very rigid Council regime, the first Muslim burial in Harehills cemetery. An unsung hero.

Sadly, many children of mixed race unions have had little support from the main Asian community, and follow on family histories become hard to trace. The trials and tribulations of those outliers have had rare exposure and we will never really understand how living in those times affected their futures.

The recession of the seventies meant that many textile firms became bankrupt. Japan had flooded the market with cheaper more fashionable cloth and man-made materials for the modern age. Many a smoke filled drawing rooms of the houses were often packed with young and middle aged men discussing global historical events like the Suez crisis, Nasser, Gadafi and others. Often, I would be the gopher to run and fetch more cigarettes from the corner shop and linger and listen to what the grown-ups were saying.

Malik Fateh Baaz Khan father of Sitara and Bilkis Mahmood of Blackstone Law Solicitors, and of my very dear friend Ajaz Khan would add his wisdom to the possible consequences of what was unfolding on the world stage and its implications for us as British muslims.

By now many more families were settled here in the UK. The growing number of redundancies at that time of high unemployment, and little or no re-training or education facilities for the workers laid off meant that these 'visible' minorities were more noticed in the benefits offices and the streets and the parks as they looked for work in an increasingly diminishing and fast disappearing industry. These visible minorities became the targets of racist bullying and provocation, and sad to say the phenomenon of 'Paki-bashing' became a commonplace occurrence on the streets and in the schoolyards of Leeds and Britain in general. The militant racist side of football hooliganism manifested itself as the Service Crew in Leeds United's fan base, and encouraged by the speeches of the likes of the MP Enoch Powell famous for his 'rivers of blood' slogan, added its own particular brand of venom to the mix.

David Oluwale, a Nigerian British man was hounded by the police, badly beaten and drowned in the River Aire in April 1969. The officers responsible served short sentences for actual bodily assault. The Police were notorious for corruption and racism in Leeds. The lead investigating officer Chief Superintendent Perkins to his credit recommended charging the officers with murder, in spite of this the Crown Prosecution Service refused to do so.

In July of 1969, a small white gang set upon Bhupinder Singh and Dian Singh Ball in the Burley area of Leeds. One of them, a local lad Kenneth Horsefall was killed in Hyde Park after this altercation. He was the brother of a friend of mine, Robert. Needless to say that affected our relationship. We lived off Burley Road on Westfield Road one street away from his house. I still remember my father coming early from work and helping him barricade the windows with wardrobes and planks. The racist National Front had leafleted to say they were going to march down our street. Sure enough records show that about 1000 white men and women surged into Hyde Park Road, attacking Asian owned shops and setting fire to cars belonging to Pakistanis. They chanted 'Sieg Heil' and gave Nazi salutes.

Immigrant communities all over the world have a flexible response to the changing and challenging circumstances that they regularly find themselves in. When resources are scarce, people become resourceful and an extraordinary level innovation takes over. The experience of mass redundancies from the bottom strata of the employment ladder within just a few short years of arriving in the UK sparked a natural aversion and resistance to dependency on employers. So began the move towards a preference to self-employment amongst the Asian communities. Private hire driving, food and catering in the form of takeaways and restaurants, market trading in fashion and fancy goods became the preferred options. Hard work paid off, and now the Asian community is well grounded in the small business sector of Britain's high streets.

The flexibility of being independent of clocking-on timing routines at factories allowed the Asian community to pursue their religious and cultural duties and roles. There was a mushrooming of Mosques and Social Welfare Societies established to maintain and further advance our religious and cultural identities. The elders in effect saw that over time the second and third generations born here in the UK, would lose their sense of belonging to their roots. The loss of mother tongues such as Urdu, Punjabi and the Arabic recitation of the Holy Quran would mean a dilution of the traditions and tenets of faith, nationality and culture. The youth in particular were vulnerable to this type of erosion of

cultural values and norms. Indeed, often the youth would lead double-lives as they negotiated the channels between host and immigrant culture in their attempts at achieving acceptability amongst their peers and friends.

The Crescent Star movement was established by Raja Akhtar and Mahboob Hussain in the late sixties as a response to some of the issues facing the Pakistani youth of the area. Focussing on sport and events in the cultural calendar, they had the use of the Belle Vue Centre on weekends. Mohammed Alam, also known as Little Prince, an enthusiastic wrestler who later became the Heavyweight Champion of Tag Wrestling with his tag partner Tiger Dalbir Gil Singh coached and encouraged. The wrestling matches can be seen on Youtube these days, but were often filmed for the World of Sport and Grandstand. These were national TV productions, popular throughout the country. Prince's brothers, Mohammed Akram (Mo), Mohammed Aslam (Junior) and Cheema have all aged gracefully but still carry the strongman aura and command respect in the community. Such respect and reputation was largely due to the Belle Vue Centre's youth club work.

Notable older ladies, the matrons of the Asian community would use such facilities to have gatherings focussed around religious and cultural ceremonies. Craft schools were established to preserve and encourage these skills and traditions, making the centre uniquely accessible to a range of the local demographics.

The Crescent Star cricket team was established and die-hard fans of the game practised in the gyms of this very valuable and badly needed youth club. Of course, this youth provision just like others in and around the inner city areas of Leeds was stopped and the building was demolished by the Council. The inflated price of land close to the proximity of the University made it a prime site for developers to convert to flats and accommodation at the expense of youth aspiration and development. To date, there has been no other alternative provision like that, in spite of the demands made by successive generations in the area. Partly as a result, crime and youth delinquency has soared and is now difficult to reign in.

Where we go as a community from here will be determined by the quality of our youth leadership, and how they are encouraged to respond to the needs of a culturally, religiously, politically and economically diverse diaspora. The use of more and more advanced technologies and social media can, if used positively, be a binding and unifying force creating common ground and a sense of common purpose. Alternatively, if negatively applied, the same technology can tear apart the delicately established, sensitive relationship nurtured through years of cautious association.